

**2 Timothy 4:3-4** <sup>3</sup> For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; <sup>4</sup> And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

**AMPLIFIED** <sup>3</sup> For the time is coming when [people] will not tolerate (endure) sound and wholesome instruction, but having ears itching [for something pleasing and gratifying], they will gather to themselves one teacher after another to a considerable number, chosen to satisfy their own liking and to foster the errors they hold, <sup>4</sup> And will turn aside from hearing the truth and wander off into myths and man-made fictions.

There are two simple yet profound statements that have been made regarding human history:

- **History repeats itself.**
- **The only thing we learn from history is that we never learn from history.**

The wise King Solomon also had a uniquely profound way of expressing these concepts:

**Ecclesiastes 1:9-11** <sup>9</sup> The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. <sup>10</sup> Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us. <sup>11</sup> There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.

The “river of history,” which has carried mankind’s very existence along on its swift and unyielding current, follows a curious path governed by one potent word: **CHOICE**. In every age, when men have chosen TRUTH, its current has borne them into waters of refreshing that ultimately ended in a great outpouring of God’s Spirit upon mankind. But when men have chosen ERROR, its current has pulled them quickly into the treacherous rapids of heresy from which few ever recovered. It is at these “forks” in the riverbed that many have made “spiritual shipwreck” as they simply made the wrong choice.

The word “heresy” actually comes from the Greek word “choice” (“haireisis”), and means “a chosen course of thought and action, hence one’s chosen opinion; doctrinal departures from revealed truth.” Biblical scholars find that heresies “reappear with various modifications in almost every subsequent period.” Heresy “disturbed the unity of doctrine and of fellowship in the early church, which was therefore forced to exclude those holding false doctrine from its communion.” Typically, rather than repent, the excluded heretics formed “churches” of their own.

We are living in crucial times, when the river of man’s history is about to divide for the final time. The true CHURCH will be caught away into the presence of the One she loves, while the WORLD (including most of nominal CHRISTIANITY) will be dashed on the rough shoals of the Tribulation Period. Few who live beyond the Rapture will survive the Tribulation, and those who do will have forever lost any opportunity to belong to the Bride of Christ and live in the New Jerusalem.

Amazingly, the very same heresies that carried many in the first century church off into doctrinal and spiritual destruction in the “Dark Ages” have resurfaced in the river of history just in time to divert souls into the same errors - and thus into the “Darkest Age” the world has ever known! The problem is that Christianity has not learned anything from her history! Her total lack of discernment calls these heinous errors by the names “revival,” “new revelation” and “liberty” when they are in fact the same bondages that destroyed her witness in the first century. The penalty for her first mistake was hundreds of years of spiritual darkness and millions of lost souls. This time, the penalty will be eternal.

- C.S. Lewis said it well: “Old error in new dress is ever error nonetheless.”
- We are basically aware of the later revisions to the gospel message by SCHOLASTIC THEOLOGY and the CATHOLIC CHURCH. These include the adoption of the Trinity, a different mode and formula of baptism, the elimination of speaking in tongues and the Gifts of the Spirit, etc. etc.

- **BUT DID YOU KNOW THAT THIS GROSS ACCUMULATION OF ERRORS HAD ITS BEGINNINGS IN THE FIRST CENTURY IN TWO KEY HERESIES?**
- The Apostles fought them valiantly but eventually - as always - it came down to the CHOICE made by each individual disciple. The battle for truth was lost after their death and the vast majority of the church experienced a "Great Falling Away." THE MAJORITY OF CHRISTENDOM WAS LOST!
- **It should not be thought strange that the end-time church would see a resurgence of the same errors, since the devil is trying to prevent TRUTH from making inroads in Christianity.**

## Take a close look at the subjects Paul ties together in 2 Thessalonians 2 ...

*<sup>1</sup> Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, <sup>2</sup> That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. <sup>3</sup> Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; <sup>4</sup> Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. <sup>5</sup> Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? <sup>6</sup> And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. <sup>7</sup> For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. <sup>8</sup> And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: <sup>9</sup> Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, <sup>10</sup> And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. <sup>11</sup> And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: <sup>12</sup> That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. <sup>13</sup> But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: <sup>14</sup> Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>15</sup> Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. <sup>16</sup> Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, <sup>17</sup> Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.*

- Coming of Christ in TWO parts: FOR church and WITH church
  - Day of Christ is SECOND part - "at hand" means "fixed, set"
  - Two things precede that day: APOSTASY and ANTICHRIST
  - Church knows what restrains Antichrist - Holy Ghost in them!
  - **Heresy (choice to believe error)** can be due to ignorance or falling into a trap of Satan
  - **Apostasy (knowing defection or "divorce" from truth)** is deliberate; but HERESY CAN LEAD TO APOSTASY!
  - **THE ONLY ESCAPE FROM "STRONG DELUSION" (SENT BY GOD) IS TO RECEIVE THE "LOVE OF THE TRUTH"**
  - All Apostates will be lost!
  - **WHAT GUARDS US FROM THE SPIRIT OF APOSTASY?**
1. Salvation through sanctification
  2. Belief of (adherence to) the truth
  3. Holding Apostolic traditions (recommendations from godly elders vs. scriptural commands)
  4. Being established in word and work (James 2:14-20)

The two key heresies which will resurface before the Rapture are “the Doctrine of the Nicolaitanes” and “the Doctrine of Gnosticism.” Since most of Christendom is already ensnared by other false doctrines, these will be unleashed on those in the Spirit-filled church in an attempt to deceive even “the very elect” through FALSE SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES.

**Matthew 24:24** *For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.*

## **THE DOCTRINE OF THE NICOLAITANES**

- Acts 6:3-5 tells us that NICOLAS, a proselyte of Antioch, was one of the first seven church deacons chosen to look after the business matters of the early church (so the Apostles could freely minister).
- Several of the early church fathers mention in their writings about “heresies” that NICOLAS backslid and introduced the DOCTRINE OF THE NICOLAITANES into the early church.
- This doctrine came about as a “knee-jerk” reaction to the legalism of the Judaizers and abused Paul’s doctrine of the grace of God, introducing a false freedom into the church. Nicolas and his followers erred in combating one extreme teaching with another extreme teaching!
- In the book of Revelation, John compares the Nicolaitanes to Balaam in the Old Testament who “cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel” (Revelation 2:14-15). Balaam was unsuccessful in cursing Israel from without, but he taught them to mix godliness and worldliness (Numbers 22-25) and they cursed themselves from within!
- Nicolas’ doctrine was based on Greek dualism. He declared that Christians - since they were sinners saved by grace - could live like the world on the outside and still remain saved on the inside. His teaching would later be the basis of the doctrine of eternal security (once saved, always saved) and the practice of the confessional (confessing to a priest while still practicing sin!).
- Since his teaching required no outward (or inward!) change to be saved, he and his followers attracted large numbers of converts - both from the pagan religions and from lukewarm Apostolics.
- His message to the Apostolic church was: Why live in the “legalism and bondage” of holiness and sanctification (the teachings of the Apostles) when you can be “free in Jesus” through His teaching?
- Nicolas violated Apostolic teaching on sanctification, which was part of their teaching on salvation.
- In Apostolic teaching, a holiness lifestyle covered standards of dress, types of activities they participated in, and other codes of conduct (Romans 6:1-2, Romans 12:1-2, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7, 1 Timothy 2:8-10, Hebrews 12:14, 1 Peter 1:15-16, etc. etc.).
- NICOLAS TAUGHT THAT “EXTERNALS” OF HOLINESS WERE NOT IMPORTANT.
- Holiness was the first thing to go in the “great falling away” of the first century, but it was soon followed by real repentance, water baptism by immersion in Jesus’ name, speaking in tongues and the gifts of the Spirit, and the oneness of God. HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF!
- God said that He “hated” this teaching twice in Revelation 2:6 and 2:15. He still hates it!

## **THE DOCTRINE OF GNOSTICISM**

- The word Gnostic comes from the Greek word for “knowledge” (“gnosis”). This group claimed extra-Biblical revelation, and were fascinated with the unseen spirit world, hierarchies of angels, etc. You were not “spiritual” unless you bought into their so-called secret knowledge, mappings of the world of principalities and powers, etc. Paul warned the Colossians against such “knowledge” ...

**Colossians 2:18-19** <sup>18</sup> *Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,* <sup>19</sup> *And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.*

- The Gnostics looked down on the Apostles and Bible-based Christians, priding themselves on their “secret knowledge” of the “deeper things of the Spirit.” Gnosticism led people beyond the sure foundation of Scripture into the orbit of persuasive personalities and subjective experiences. Apostolic worship is emotional, to be sure, but also involves the mind, the will ... and the WORD! Our openness to experience can also make us prey to novelty. We MUST be Bible-based people!
- John uses several “plays on words” in his epistles to illustrate his point that REAL SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE always involves keeping the COMMANDMENTS of the Lord. Here’s one ...

**1 John 2:3-6** <sup>3</sup> And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. <sup>4</sup> He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. <sup>5</sup> But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. <sup>6</sup> He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

- A current fad is to ask: “What’s the Lord been saying to you LATELY?” The inference is that God has a “new word” (charismatics emphasize it as the “rhema”) - but His Word has never changed!

**Novelist Lloyd Douglas tells about a man who went to visit his old violin teacher and asked, “What’s new?” “I’ll tell you what’s new!” said the teacher. He grabbed his tuning fork and banged it. The tuning fork, at 440 cycles per second, vibrated an “A note” which came out loud and clear. “Do you hear that? That’s an ‘A’” he proclaimed. “Now, upstairs a soprano rehearses endlessly and she’s always off key. Next door I have a cello player who plays his instrument very poorly. There is an out-of-tune piano on the other side of me. I’m surrounded by terrible noise night and day.” Plunking the “A” again, he continued. “Do you hear that? That’s an ‘A’ today. It will be an ‘A’ tomorrow. It will never change.” AS BELIEVERS, WE MUST FIND OUR “A NOTE” IN GOD’S WORD, AND EVALUATE EVERY SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE BY IT!**

The error of the Nicolaitanes appeals to those who are “sub-spiritual” (worldly), while the error of the Gnostics appeals to those who are “super-spiritual” (a law unto themselves). The devil doesn’t care which extreme he has to use to get you out of the church! Submission to a godly pastor and to God’s Word is the only way to avoid the “revival of heresy” which is sweeping the church world.

**HAVE YOU EVER HEARD THIS?** “I don’t see it like you do, but my interpretation is as valid as yours. Let’s just agree to disagree.” ??? That’s not how the Apostles and the early church felt about it!

**2 Peter 1:20-2:2** <sup>20</sup> Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. <sup>21</sup> For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. <sup>1</sup> But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. <sup>2</sup> And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.

**WHILE OTHERS SPEAK EVIL OF TRUTH, WE MUST RECEIVE A LOVE FOR IT TO BE SAVED!**